

The Director of Central Intelligence

Washington, D. C. 20505

Executive Registry

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30 May 1981

Mr. Arthur Ochs Sulzberger  
Chairman and President  
The New York Times Company  
229 West 43 Street  
New York, New York 10036

Dear Punch:

Thanks for your letter expressing concern about CIA policies governing its relationship with journalists. I, too, strongly support a free press, separate and independent from the Government, and appreciate the respect which it commands for us in the world and the credibility it gives American journalism among our own people. It is our policy not to enter into any paid or contractual relationships with journalists. I do not believe in using journalists as agents. I don't think it is good for us or for them. I don't want or need that kind of cover and I want to accommodate the interest you express in maintaining the independent credibility of American journalism in every possible way.

However, I am sure that you recognize the obligation of the Director of Central Intelligence to see that essential intelligence and legitimate national security needs are met. It seems inconsistent with that obligation for the Director of Central Intelligence to put himself in a position where, should a particular item of intelligence critical to the national interest be available only by paying some journalist to get it, he would be unable to do so.

I would not ever expect this to happen because a journalist who finds himself in that position would almost certainly be prepared to meet our needs without a paid or contractual relationship. Should the unexpected ever develop, I would not want to be unable to respond to what could be an emergency involving human lives or critical national interests.

Anytime you would like to discuss this problem, I would be pleased to talk to you about it.

Yours,



William J. Casey

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**The New York Times**229 WEST 43 STREET  
NEW YORK, N.Y. 10036ARTHUR OCHS SULZBERGER  
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Dear Bill:

Over the years I have had lengthy correspondence with successive directors of the CIA regarding the Agency's policy on use of journalists as agents and informants. I am now writing to you because I believe that the CIA's current policy is wrong and detrimental to the interests of this country.

I am sure you are aware that in 1976 the CIA under George Bush's directorship adopted a policy forbidding "any paid or contractual relationship with any full-time or part-time news correspondent accredited by any U.S. news service, newspaper, periodical, radio or television network or station". We were naturally pleased with that statement, and equally discouraged when Admiral Turner modified the policy to permit exceptions to its prohibitions by approval of the director.

We were particularly disturbed to learn from Admiral Turner in 1980 that, over a period of two and a half years, he had found occasion to authorize three such "exceptions" to the prohibition against use of journalistic cover.

In this area, a policy which permits exceptions and which apparently permits them with ease is meaningless. The very reasons why the CIA should have such a policy prove that the policy should be firm and permit no exceptions:

. A free press, separate and independent from the Government, is an asset unique to the United States. Other countries recognize that we are unique in this regard and respect us for it.

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. The credibility of American journalism depends on this separation. A policy which states that journalists may be used as agents calls into question the independence and credibility of every correspondent of the American press.

. The suspicion that the CIA's current policy creates in the minds of those outside this country endangers the prestige our country has earned by preserving a free press.

When he wrote to me in June 1980, Admiral Turner noted that the CIA had not actually used journalistic cover in more than three years. Nevertheless, he said it was important for the CIA to preserve this option.

I believe strongly that a free press and the prestige that the United States derives from a free press are much more important than preserving an option for the CIA to use the press for its purposes. We cannot have both. I urge you, therefore, to return to an absolute policy, prohibiting without exception any use of the press as agents or for purposes of cover.

Sincerely,

*Punch*

The Hon. William Casey  
Director  
Central Intelligence Agency  
Washington, D.C. 20505

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